

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

WE THE PEOPLE: PROJECT CITIZEN STUDENTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN TUCSON, AZ

HON. RAÚL M. GRIJALVA

OF ARIZONA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, April 27, 2004

Mr. GRIJALVA. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to commend a group of students from my district for their civic engagement. Along with their teacher, these 23 students developed a proposal for curbing bullying in Arizona schools. This proposal was taken up in the Arizona State legislature with bipartisan support. The bill was introduced by Representative Phil Lopez and Representative Linda Gray, and has already passed the Education Committee and has garnered the support of Gov. Janet Napolitano. If passed, the bill would require that school boards adopt and enforce procedures that prohibit the harassment, bullying and intimidation of pupils.

Using the skill of civic engagement, taught through Project Citizen, these students have made a positive impact in their community, and serve as role models for their peers. Project Citizen is a curricular program for middle school students that promotes competent and responsible participation in local and State government. The program helps young people learn how to monitor and influence public policy. In the process, they develop support for democratic values and principles, tolerance, and feelings of political efficacy. The Project Citizen program is administered by the Center for Civic Education with the assistance of the National Conference of State Legislatures. It is funded by the U.S. Department of Education by act of Congress.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the contribution of these students and applaud their efforts to be actively involved in efforts to improve their community. On behalf of the schools and children of Arizona I would like to thank the following students for their admirable interest in civic engagement. I hope their enthusiasm for government is shared among their peers.

Marina Ardt, Eva Baisan, Edward Barnes, Amanda Belt, Katie Brown, Audrey Bustamante, Nicholas Franco, Taiya Gehrels, Brianna Herreras-Crouse, Shelby Kline, Katie Knight, Mounir Koussa, Alison Lambert, Ben Langworthy, Pricilla Martinez, Dillon McCallum, Dylan Monke, Danny O'Sullivan, Johnny Police, Joy Ratanavongsa, Tanisha Sosa, John Taylor, Jessica Willy, and their teacher, Cheri Bludau of the Mansfeld Middle School of Tucson.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to submit the attached article from the Tucson Citizen recognizing the valiant efforts of these young adults.

KIDS' ASSIGNMENT TURNS HEADS AT STATE LEVEL

Here is a brief primer on the workings of the Arizona Legislature from an expert who has learned how to write a bill, have it introduced by a lawmaker, then watched it advance through the Legislature:

"It is a very long process," explained Tashina Sosa. "It's like a never-ending thriller book."

Thriller book? Perhaps.

Horror story? More often.

But who am I to argue with an insider—someone who has seen firsthand the laborious and languorous way that the Legislature goes about its work.

There are several thousand professional lobbyists at work in Phoenix right now who are being paid well—very well—to get their employers' messages to lawmakers.

Tashina Sosa isn't one of them, although it is quite likely that she will be more successful than most of those professionals.

Sosa is a freshman at Tucson High Magnet School. And work that she and her classmates started last year when they were enrolled at Mansfeld Middle School may soon result in a law.

This law, unlike many of those passed by legislators, actually makes sense and actually is needed. It would require each school district to enact an anti-bullying policy.

Sosa and 23 other Mansfeld students were enrolled last year in a law-related education class taught by Cheri Bludau. Part of the class was a project called We the People-Project Citizen, a national program that promotes student participation in government.

After discussing several ideas and conducting research on matters ripe for change, the students settled on the issue of bullying, Bludau said.

But there were some concerns. Some students feared the topic may be too "child-like" and of little interest to the Legislature, Bludau said. Others were afraid that a law would be meaningless—that bullying was not something that could be stopped with legislation.

But the research was persuasive. Studies found that bullying is one of the most under-rated and serious problems in schools. Students involved in murders in school and students who commit suicide are far more likely to be victims of bullies than the average student is. Education and federal officials estimate that nationwide, 160,000 students miss school every day because they fear being bullied.

"A majority of adults see it as a right of passage," Bludau said, "but the students know it is impacting their lives."

Using laws written in other states as a starting point, Bludau's class wrote a bill it hoped to have introduced in the Legislature. Class members took the bill to Project Citizen's state competition last year and won first place. They then submitted it for national competition and earned a "superior" rating—the highest award.

Last summer, Bludau e-mailed a copy of the proposed bill to Gov. Janet Napolitano. Within 45 minutes, Napolitano wrote back, saying she would be very much behind it.

Thus emboldened, the students went hunting for a legislator who would introduce the bill—and they found support from state Rep. Phil Lopes, a Tucson Democrat. He liked the bill, but because he is a member of the minority party, he needed help from a Republican. Rep. Linda Gray, a Glendale Republican and chair of the House Education Committee, signed on.

The bill was formally introduced and assigned a number and title: "HB2533—Schools; policies; bullying" and scheduled for a hearing and debate last week before the Education Committee.

The students were scheduled to go to Phoenix to testify in support of their bill—but they were foiled by another state issue. It was time for them to take part of the mandated AIMS test. Nonetheless, the bill easily passed the committee.

The bill is scheduled to be heard in the House Judiciary Committee today. Lopes is optimistic that it will eventually pass both houses and be signed into law by Napolitano. "The kids did all the work," Lopes said. "It's just incredible. I knew nothing about the substance of the topic. But I saw what they had done and said, 'My God, we've got to help them out.'"

Sosa is excited that her class's work may soon be memorialized in state law. And so is her classmate, Mounir Koussa, also now a freshman at Tucson High. "It's good for me to know that a student can make a difference in society," Koussa said.

It has taken almost two months for the bill to make it to this point in the legislative process, and Bludau still can't quite believe her students have been so successful.

"Way back in January, little did we know that we could have this kind of impact on the state of Arizona," she said. "I'm very proud of my students, as you can tell."

Cheri Bludau's students have completed their assignment. Now legislators must complete theirs.

WHAT THE LAW WOULD DO

If the bill written by students at Mansfeld Middle School becomes law, it would require that school boards adopt and enforce procedures that prohibit the harassment, bullying and intimidation of pupils.

Those procedures must include:

A confidential process that allows pupils to report incidents of harassment, intimidation or bullying to school officials.

A procedure for the parents or guardians of pupils to submit written reports concerning harassment, intimidation or bullying to school officials.

A requirement that school district employees report suspected harassment, intimidation or bullying.

A formal process for the documentation and investigation of reported incidents.

Disciplinary procedures for students admitting to, or found guilty of harassment, intimidation or bullying.

A procedure that provides consequences for submitting false reports.

The bill submitted by the students was amended in the House Education Committee to cover events not only on school grounds, but also on school buses, at school bus stops and at all school-sponsored events and activities.

A MODEL TWO-YEAR COLLEGE

HON. BARNEY FRANK

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, April 27, 2004

Mr. FRANK of Massachusetts. Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to see the Boston Globe, in an editorial on Thursday, April 22, give appropriate recognition to the excellent job that

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